



Rita Dove

Shape the lips to an o, say a. That's island. One word of Swedish has changed the whole neighborhood. When I look up, the yellow house on the corner is a galleon stranded in flowers. Around it

the wind. Even the high roar of a leaf-mulcher could be the horn blast from a ship as it skirts the misted shoals. We don't need much more to keep things going. Families complete themselves and refuse to budge from the present, the present extends its glass forehead to sea (backyard breezes, scattered cardinals)

and if, one evening, the house on the corner took off over the marshland, neither I nor my neighbor would be amazed. Sometimes

a word is found so right it trembles at the slightest explanation. You start out with one thing, end up with another, and nothing's like it used to be, not even the future.

— “The Yellow House on the Corner”



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1952
- * African-American poet and novelist
- * Former Poet Laureate of the Library of Congress

This page was researched and submitted by Valerie D. Levy. It was updated by Lauren Curtright on 1/8/05.



Rita Dove

Biography

Rita Dove was born in 1952 in Akron, Ohio. Her father was a research chemist at the Goodyear plant in Akron and her mother, a homemaker. As a child, the young Dove had a particular fondness and passion for books and said that her parents encouraged her to read anything that she pleased; her parents valued and understood the importance of an education. Dove went on to graduate summa cum laude from Miami University of Ohio, and then to study German at the Universitat Tubingen, where she would become a Fulbright Scholar. She also received her Masters of Fine Arts degree at the University of Iowa. It was there where she met her husband to be, German novelist and playwright Fred Viebahn. Together, the two currently reside in Charlottesville, Virginia with their daughter Aviva. She is presently a Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia where she teaches creative writing.

Dove has been the recipient of many prestigious awards and has held various seats and positions. She was the seventh Poet Laureate/Consultant in Poetry of the Library of Congress from 1993 to 1995. She was the youngest person ever appointed to that position as well as the first African American ever appointed. She has also been honored with fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts in 1978 and 1989 and from the Guggenheim Foundation in 1983-84. Dove has been given honorary doctorates from several different universities and colleges. She has held residencies at Tuskegee Institute, the National Humanities Center and the Rockefeller Foundation's Villa Serbelloni in Italy.

She was named Woman of the Year by Glamour magazine and given the NAACP Great American Artist Award, both in 1993. She won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in poetry for her book of poems, *Thomas and Beulah*. She has been given the Folgers Shakespeare Library's Renaissance Forum Award, the General Electric Foundation award, as well as many other honors. In 1995 she, along with Jimmy Carter, welcomed a gathering of Nobel Laureates in Literature to the city of Atlanta, Georgia, hosted by the Cultural Olympiad of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. Dove was also responsible for writing the text for Alvin Singleton's symphony "Umoja - Each One of Us Counts," which was commissioned by the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games to be performed during the opening festivities of the 1992 Summer Olympic Games.



Rita Dove

Biography continued

Rita Dove's first work *The Yellow House on the Corner* was published in 1980. It is a collection of poems dealing with various topics and experiences such as adolescence, romantic encounters, and glimpses into slave history. It was received well by most critics and caught the attention of her peers. *Thomas and Beulah*, another collection of poems is probably her most famous piece of literature.

One critic wrote "[S]he speaks with a directness and a dramatic intensity that commands attention. . . [Rita Dove] fashions imaginative constructs that strike the reader as much by their 'rightness' as their originality." Using her poetry, she recounts the lives of her two grandparents, telling both sides of their story: Thomas first, and then Beulah, which in a sense gives her the last word. Dove explains their viewpoints regarding each other and life with a simple, yet elegant and realistic prose. Dove has penned many collections of poems; however, *Through the Ivory Gate* was her initial attempt at writing a novel. Encouraged by her husband and publishers, she wrote this story about a young African-American woman and her experiences as she returns to her hometown (which, coincidentally, is Akron) to perform and teach children at a local school about puppets and creative arts. Like the story's young protagonist, Dove herself is also very involved with young children. She has appeared on such shows such as "Sesame Street" and NBC's "The Today Show," attempting to draw people who have little prior interest in it to poetry. Her self-declared intention is "to bring poetry into everyday discourse . . . to make it much more of a household word."



Rita Dove

Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

- American Smooth* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).
On the Bus with Rosa Parks (W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).
“An Intact World” in *New Expansive Poetry: Theory, Criticism, History*, ed. R.S. Gwynn (Story Line Press, 1999).
Mother Love (W.W. Norton & Company, 1995).
The Poet’s World (Library of Congress, 1995).
The Darker Face of the Earth (Story Line Press, 1994).
Selected Poems (Pantheon, 1993).
Through the Ivory Gate (Pantheon, 1992).
Grace Notes (W.W. Norton & Company, 1989).
Thomas and Beulah (Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1986).
Museum (Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1983).
Fifth Sunday (University of Kentucky Press, 1983).
The Yellow House on the Corner (Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1980).

Works about the author

- “Rita Dove” in *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series* (Gale, 1994).
Bada, Valerie. “‘Dramatising the Verse’: or Versifying the Drama: Rita Dove’s *The Darker Face of the Earth: A Verse Play*” in *The Mechanics of the Mirage: Postwar American Poetry*, ed. Michel Delville and Christine Pagnouelle (Liege Language and Literature, English Department, Universite de Liege, 2000).
Berger, Charles. “The Granddaughter’s Archive: Rita Dove’s *Thomas and Beulah*” (*Western Humanities Review*, 1996-1997).
Booth, Alison. “Abduction and Other Severe Pleasures: Rita Dove’s *Mother Love*” (*Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 1996).
Carlisle, Theodora. “Reading the Scars: Rita Dove’s *The Darker Face of the Earth*” (*African American Review*, 2000).
Cook, Emily Walker. “‘But She Won’t Set Foot / In His Turtle-Dove Nash’: Gender Roles and Gender Symbolism in Rita Dove’s *Thomas and Beulah*” (*College Language Association Journal*, 1995).



Rita Dove

Selected Bibliography continued

Works about the author continued

- Cushman, Stephen. "And the Dove Returned" (*Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 1996).
- Erickson, Peter. "Rita Dove's Shakespeares" in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. Marianne Novy (St. Martin's, 1999).
- Ingersoll, Earl G., ed. *Conversations with Rita Dove* (University Press of Mississippi, 2003).
- Lofgren, Lotta. "Partial Horror: Fragmentation and Healing in Rita Dove's *Mother Love*" (*Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 1996).
- O'Connell, Erin. "Black Oedipus? Slavery in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *The Darker Face of the Earth*" (*Text & Presentation: The Journal of the Comparative Drama Conference*, 2003).
- Pereira, Malin. "'When the Pear Blossoms/Cast Their Pale Faces on/the Darker Face of the Earth': Miscegenation, the Primal Scene, and the Incest Motif in Rita Dove's Work" (*African American Review*, 2002).
- Proitsaki, Maria. "A 'Circus-Freak' and 20,000 Other Migrants in Rita Dove's *Museum*" (*Moderna Sprak*, 1999).
- Righelato, Pat. "Geometry and Music: Rita Dove's *Fifth Sunday*" (*Yearbook of English Studies*, 2001).
- Shaughnessy, Brenda. "Rita Dove: Taking the Heat" (*Publishers Weekly*, 1999).
- Stefen, Therese. "Rooted Displacement in Form: Rita Dove's Sonnet Cycle *Mother Love*" in *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry*, ed. Joanne V. Gabbin (University Press of Virginia, 1999).
- Van Dyne, Susan R. "Siting the Poet: Rita Dove's Refiguring of Traditions" in *Women Poets of the Americas: Toward a Pan-American Gathering*, ed. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan and Cordelia Chavez Candelaria (University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).
- Walzer, Kevin. "Rita Dove's Ascent" (*ELF: Eclectic Literary Forum*, 1996).



Rita
Dove

Selected Bibliography continued

Interviews

Interview with VG recorded in November 2004.

Cavalieri, Grace. "Rita Dove: An Interview" (*The American Poetry Review*, 1995).

Pereira, Malin. "An Interview with Rita Dove" (*Contemporary Literature*, 1999).

"Shine Up Your Words: A Morning with Rita Dove" (Virginia Center for the Book, 1994).

"Bill Moyers' Journal: Poet Laureate Rita Dove" (PBS, 1994).

"A Conversation with Poet Laureate Rita Dove" (Library of Congress, 1993).

Works in languages other than English

Dutch

Iets dat te groot is om te zien: moderne Amerikaanse dichters, trans. J. Bernlef and Peter Nijmeijer (Meulenhoff, 1991).

French

Thomas et Beulah, trans. Jean Migrenne (L'Harmattan, 1999).

German

Die gleserne Stirn der Gegenwart (Heiderhoff, 1989).

Die morgenlandische Tanzerin: Gedichte, trans. Karin Graf (Rowohlt, 1988).

Hebrew

Aruhat boker shel alufim, trans. Mosheh Dor (Keshev le-shirah, 2000).